

# LutheranWoman

November 2005

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Peace in a Time of Anxiety

Gratitude: Our Gladness Made Visible

Saints, Large "S" and Small

Dancing in the Aisle

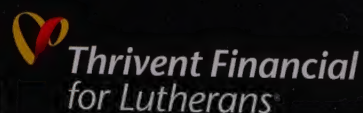




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## ACT BOLDLY IN PEACE

As Christians we act boldly *for* peace, but we also act boldly *in* peace. With peace and gratitude in our hearts, and surrounded by the saints, we can make a difference—for the sake of the world.

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# Of Peace, Saints, and Gratitude

by Kate Sprutta Elliott

**IN THIS ISSUE'S SESSION OF THE BIBLE STUDY, WE EXPLORE WHAT IT MEANS TO ACT BOLDLY IN PEACE.**

The word that the apostle Paul uses for this fruit of the Spirit is *eirene*. It refers to the peace, the well-being that grows out of right relationship with God, with God's children, and with ourselves.

At this time of year, that sense of peace and well-being can be difficult to maintain. Take some time to read Nancy's Roth's article, "Peace in a Time of Anxiety." Her advice about finding inner peace through centering prayer, our mind-body connection, and the natural world can help you as you prepare for the busy weeks ahead.

November 1 is the day set aside in the church year to remember the saints at peace—the ones recognized through the ages and the ones we remember in our hearts. Two articles in this issue touch on our understanding of the saints. Patricia Lull's article, "Saints, Large 'S' and Small," takes a historical and theological view of the saints and their place in our heritage. Audrey Riley's "In the Footsteps of Saints" is a reflection on what we can learn from the saints today. As you remember the saints you have known, may you be encouraged by their example and filled with the peace that passes understanding.

This issue contains two stories that discuss peace in a part of the world racked by violence—the

Middle East. "A Hospital with Heart" was written by college student Karin Brown, who volunteered at Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem. Her stories and photos of the importance of the hospital in the midst of difficult and dangerous circumstances remind us to pray and advocate for peace and justice in the Holy Land. "Acting Boldly for Peace" tells us about the struggles of the Palestinian people and the ELCA's "Peace Not Walls" campaign. Author Suad Younan shares her insights about how women come together in an interfaith group for bold peace-building in their land.

Finally, we have much to be thankful for in our lives and in this country. Karen Melang in "Gratitude: Gladness Made Visible" reminds us of the dangers of having plenty (and wanting more) and helps us to think about gratitude, not only on Thanksgiving Day but in how we live our lives, boldly openhanded.

We hope that you know both peace and gratitude in this season. And if you find an article in this issue that especially inspires you or helps you on your faith journey, share it with a friend who doesn't read this magazine—and encourage her to subscribe.

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Kate Sprutta Elliott is editor of *Lutheran Woman Today*.

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GIVE US THIS DAY

# Do Good and Seek Peace

by Marj Leegard

**PSALM 34:14** "DEPART FROM EVIL, AND DO GOOD; SEEK PEACE, AND PURSUE IT." (RSV)

When I think of peace, I want peace to descend. Come down ever so gently on my head and envelop my whole body. Peace should be declared elsewhere and given to me as gift.

Let the heavenly voices in a brilliant cloud of light sing, "Peace!" Let me listen as my Savior says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." Artists have often painted peace as still water in a still forest clearing under a still sky. But those artists have not told us how far we must walk to find this spot. Through how many briars and fallen branches and muddy streams must we struggle?

When we prepare to defend ourselves and our ideals, we make sacrifices. We fashion tools and we find soldiers to use the tools. We sing the songs that remind us that we have done this before. We write the poems and paste things on our cars to remind us and others that we support the effort. But peace? Let us find a chair so that we can sit down and listen to our hopes and dreams for a distant peace, now out of sight.

When our children are small and the repair man has the kitchen pretty much occupied with tool boxes and the telephone rings for the twenty-ninth time, we have words that come unbidden, but with great volume. "A little peace and quiet!"

Bring it to us.

The Psalmist turns our attention to our feet, our hands, our minds, and our souls. Pursue

peace. This is not an inactive situation. Get up. Get into all of the stretch-and-ready positions. Listen to the cheering on the sidelines. Grasp the outstretched hand with the cup of cool water. Be ready to run.

If the goal is peace, it is also the race. Few races begin at the goal line. Races begin where the goal is far ahead and almost out of sight, but the path is right beneath our feet.

We have a new puppy, Foxy. She was born to be a little red cattle dog. We have no cattle. Foxy would like to remind huge creatures that it is she who will decide where they are allowed to walk. We need a dog who will bark when a car comes into the yard. A dog who will eat the last bit of lunch so that it will not go to waste. There is a peaceful place between our needs and Foxy's needs. Peace will come when we find the place that is not our yesterday nor our tomorrow, but our path of peace for right now.

God's children everywhere wait for the peacemakers to come to their empty hands, their unprotected beds, their searching minds. Rumbling tanks have been here. Now is the time for a powerful will to pursue peace.

It might just be that in this world we will find peace when we are doing the good that God gives us to do. Right now.

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**LWT** columnist Marj Leegard and her husband, Jerome, live in Detroit Lakes, Minn.



# NOVEMBER

compiled by Audrey Novak Riley from sources including *Lutheran Book of Worship* and *Sundays and Seasons*, both available from Augsburg Fortress, Publishers ([www.augsburgfortress.org](http://www.augsburgfortress.org))

This month, as we come to the end of the church's year, the texts proclaimed in worship turn to the end of time. Our thoughts turn to our own end: the door to the dwelling place our Savior has prepared for us.

## 1 ALL SAINTS' DAY

Today we celebrate all the people of God, living and dead, who make up the body of Christ. Today or on All Saints Sunday, many congregations remember the faithful who have died during the past year.

## 3 MARTÍN DE PORRES, RENEWER OF SOCIETY

Martín was born in Lima, Peru, in 1579, the son of a Spanish knight and a freed slave woman. He joined the Dominican friars and cared for the sick with tenderness and skill. He was famous during his lifetime for his care for all the poor, regardless of race. His works of kindness included founding an orphanage, a hospital, and a clinic for cats and dogs. Martín is honored today as an advocate for Christian charity and interracial justice.

## 7 JOHN CHRISTIAN FREDERICK HEYER, BARTHOLOMAEUS ZIEGENBALG, LUDWIG NOMMENSEN, MISSIONARIES

Heyer was the first missionary sent out by American Lutherans; he went to the Andhra region of India in 1842. Ziegenbalg served the Tamil people of India in 1706. His translation of the New Testament into the Tamil language is in use today. Nommensen was sent in 1862 to Sumatra, where he preached among the Batak people. The church he founded now numbers more than half a million people.

## 11 VETERANS DAY

At 11 o'clock on November 11, 1918, the guns fell silent in Europe, ending what humanity hoped would be the war to end all wars. The Library of Congress Veterans History Project is collecting veterans' remembrances so that their stories will never be forgotten. See [www.loc.gov/vets](http://www.loc.gov/vets) for how you and your community can contribute.

As you pause at 11 o'clock for a moment of silence, give thanks for all who have served, and pray for peace in our homes, our congregations, our nation, our world.

## 11 MARTIN, BISHOP OF TOURS

One cold winter day, a beggar approached Martin, then an officer in the Roman army. Moved by compassion, he gave the man half of his cloak. That night, he dreamed he saw Jesus wrapped in the cloak—and realized that he needed to be baptized.

## 11 SØREN KIERKEGAARD, TEACHER

This nineteenth-century Danish theologian raised a prophetic voice and sharply criticized the established church of his day for its complacency.

St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minn., is the home of the Kierkegaard Library. Its nucleus is the collection of Howard and Edna Hong, who translated Kierkegaard's writings into English. See [www.stolaf.edu/collections/kierkegaard](http://www.stolaf.edu/collections/kierkegaard) for more about the library.



**17****ELIZABETH OF THURINGIA,  
PRINCESS OF HUNGARY**

Elizabeth founded hospitals and orphanages and gave the royal groceries to the hungry. She died in 1231 at the age of twenty-four.

**20****CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY**

Why do we celebrate our loving and merciful Christ as a king? Think of the kingdom he told us about, where the poor and downtrodden feast at the king's table. That's a king to follow and love.

**23****CLEMENT, BISHOP OF ROME**

Clement was bishop of Rome from about 88 to 99. Paul mentions Clement in Philippians 4:3, and early writers tell us that Clement was taught by Peter. He wrote a letter to the believers in Corinth urging them to unity and Christian love.

The church of San Clemente in Rome is a fascinating place, with its Renaissance exterior and medieval interior. In 1857, an amateur archaeologist discovered more underneath: a fourth-century basilica, larger than the medieval church above, and the first-century villa that housed the secret church Clement served. This many-layered place of faith is still in use; visitors may tour the archaeological site beneath for a small fee. See [www.initaly.com/regions/latium/church/clemente.htm](http://www.initaly.com/regions/latium/church/clemente.htm) for more.

**23****MIGUEL AGUSTÍN PRO,  
PRIEST, MARTYR**

Miguel was ordained during a turbulent time in Mexico. He and his brother were falsely charged and were executed by firing squad in 1927. Just before the guns fired, he shouted, "¡Viva Cristo Rey!" or "Long live Christ the King!"

**24****THANKSGIVING DAY (U.S.A.)**

Today people in the United States gather to give thanks for all the goodness we have received. Christians give thanks to God at all times; in fact, the word *eucharist* means thanksgiving. As grateful followers of our generous Lord, let us share our abundance with those who have less.

The ELCA's commitment to supporting the hungry and the poor around the corner and around the world is carried out by ELCA World Hunger. See [www.elca.org/hunger](http://www.elca.org/hunger) for more.

**25****ISAAC WATTS, HYMNWRITER**

Young Isaac didn't like the hymns his community sang, and that was the start of his career—he wrote about 600 hymns. *LBW* includes thirteen of Watts' hymns.

**27****FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT**

Today is the start of a new church year and of the season of joyful waiting for our Lord's coming: as a baby at Bethlehem, as our Risen Lord in word and sacrament, and as the King of Glory at the end of time. Advent combines a note of yearning (O come O come Emmanuel, *LBW* 34) with a note of joy (Wake, awake for night is flying, *LBW* 31).

Light one candle on your Advent wreath today.

**30****ST. ANDREW, APOSTLE**

Andrew was Peter's brother and one of the first to follow Jesus. In John's Gospel, he is always bringing people to meet Jesus (1:41-42; 6:8-11; 12:21-22). We can do the same.



## Leap of Faith

by Mary C. Lindberg

**"WILL JUNE GET TO PERFORM ON SATURDAY AT THE DANCE FESTIVAL?" THIS IS THE QUESTION I PRACTICE** in the car before we arrive at dance class. Korean dance class. Our six-year-old daughter, June, was born in Korea and attends a class in traditional Korean dance.

Tuesday after Tuesday, for many months, she has practiced the intricate steps, moving to the pulse of a drum that resounds in her birth country and in her DNA. Tuesday after Tuesday she has gracefully mastered many precise dance moves. Her classmates and teachers have warmly welcomed her and created a dance with her each week.

I sit and watch as June dances. Actually, I sit and watch and write and wonder. I am a European American mother seeking to give more than my own cultural background to my daughter, longing to see the world from another perspective, and eager to give June a chance to form relationships with other girls who look like her and move as she does.

Do you think my daughter eagerly awaits our journey across cultures each Tuesday? Think again. While she's talented at any sort of movement and loves to play with her fellow dancers, June frequently resists going to Korean dance class. I've come to discover, as she has, that we are taking a giant step in the cross-cultural world—past Asian American life (which we frequently enjoy with our friends and neighbors in Seattle) and on to the milieu of recent Korean immigrants. This journey makes for a giant leap, even for a gifted dancer like June.

June is not the only one who dances in a new territory. I too try to learn the steps of communicating across cultures. I try to chat with mothers who speak no English and accept the snacks they generously offer me. I am transported to another world as I observe the dancers in the mirror and feel the drumbeat affect my heartbeat.

But when the drumming stops, questions arise. Do the members of June's dance troupe also hear the call to cross cultures as people of Christ? Does the Spirit move their hearts to see the world differently as June dances into their midst?

The Korean dance troupe with whom June dances performs frequently in the Seattle area. But so far June has not been invited to join the dancers on stage. Every couple of months I hopefully ask the dance school director whether June is ready to perform with the troupe. "No, not yet," I'm told with a smile that I cannot translate. "She's not ready."

I become increasingly annoyed about this when girls who have recently started to practice are invited to perform. A three-year-old dancer has even made the grade!

When can I ask, "Why can't she perform yet?" I've always understood that I need to be respectful of another culture, but when can respect include disagreement? My mothering instinct contemplates sneaking into the costume room and picking out a dress in June's size. I am



a mom, with all the usual protective instincts. I am an adoptive mom who has to learn how protecting her child also involves a distinct cultural community caring for her.

Thanks be to God for Asian American friends who are as puzzled as I am about this “performance initiation mystery.” They help me by joining me in this cross-cultural enigma and encouraging me to be myself and keep asking for June to perform. But even they cannot understand what another European American adoptive mother might share—this confusion about how to give my child “all that she needs,” the grief that I’ll never really be able to do so, and the acknowledgment of God’s action in the whole process.

The Day of Pentecost arrives in the midst of our dance-performance quandary. I remember that so many languages were there at the birth of the church, languages spoken by wildly different communities who could have heard only mass chaos but instead heard the common language of the Spirit calling them to create a new way.

Adoption offers many graces, this being one of them. My Korean sisters and I speak a common tongue of gratitude and love for our children and hope for their future in God’s hands. We are equally called to continue bringing forth God’s creation across our cultural divide.

Fortified by a common dialect known as faith in Jesus Christ, we are all invited to know that we have a place to start on our cross-cultural journey. Unlike June, I don’t catch on quickly to new steps. But one step is all we need to learn at first. I’ve seen this initial movement—it’s a step across a threshold where two cultures and the Spirit meet. Won’t you meet June and me there?

**FORTIFIED BY A COMMON DIALECT KNOWN  
AS FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST, WE ARE ALL INVITED  
TO KNOW THAT WE HAVE A PLACE TO START ON  
OUR CROSS-CULTURAL JOURNEY.**



*June finally got her opportunity to dance.*

Mary C. Lindberg just completed her work as a Lutheran children’s pastor and now works as an editor and writer in Seattle, Wash. She and her husband, Chris, are parents to June, now 7, and Molly, 11.



Peace by Nancy Roth  
in a time of anxiety





**What is inner peace**—a phrase nearly as indefinable as the word *love*? Is it the absence of conflict and pain or the ability to ignore them? Can we call it up within ourselves or is it a gift from God? Is it even possible in this turbulent world?

I have always found that, in addition to Scripture, texts written by later saints and poets are profound spiritual resources. One of my favorites is “They Cast Their Nets” (originally titled “His Peace”), a 1924 hymn by William Alexander Percy, a Mississippi-born lawyer and poet. The hymn reminds us how many of the disciples were simple fisher folk before they answered the call to follow Jesus. That call led many of them to martyr’s deaths. A telling line in the hymn is: “The peace of God, it is no peace, but strife closed in the sod.”

That line offers truth because it avoids sketching an artificial peace that comes from fooling ourselves about reality. Ignoring the pain and suffering around us or within us cannot work in the long run. Drawn by the charisma of a young Galilean preacher, these fisher folk discovered that their lives took a turn that was anything but peaceful. The impetuous Peter, according to tradition, was

fleeing Rome during the persecution under Nero when he saw a vision of Christ and turned back to meet a martyr’s death. It is also doubtful that John—either the beloved disciple or the writer of Revelation (some biblical scholars tell us that these were different people)—lived an easy life.

“The peace of God” known by Peter and John emanated from something<sup>7</sup> deep within them, even along with the “strife closed in the sod” of their turbulent lives. It gave them an unshakable sense of joy in the presence of the risen Christ and enabled them to live fully, no matter what the circumstances.

### **How About Us?**

Inevitably, our personal experiences and world events are reminders that strife is part of human life. Whether it was when shots rang out in Dallas in 1963 or when the twin towers fell in New York in 2001, many of us can identify the moment when we were forced to leave behind childhood’s sense of

security and confront our own fragility. Ours is, increasingly, an age of anxiety.

Most of us long for the marvelous peace of God. And that peace is not reserved for apostles like Peter and John. It is not reserved for mystics like the fourteenth-century hermit Julian of Norwich, who looked out her cell window upon an England torn by rebellion and decimated by plague, yet was still able to write, “All shall be well.” It is not reserved for saints like Teresa of Avila, who trudged around Spain establishing new convents, dealing with surly mule-drivers and flea-infested inns, carrying a prayer book with her words on a bookmark: “Who has God lacks nothing.” Nor is it reserved for martyrs like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who wrote to his mother shortly before his execution, “By gracious powers so wonderfully sheltered, and confidently waiting come what may, we know that God is with us night and morning, and never fails to greet us each new day.”



**Our bodies are hard-wired for action**—fight or flight—when we feel threatened.

Try exercising off the effects of extra anxiety and diffuse its energy, opening up to God's gift of inner peace.

Instead, the peace of God is every person's birthright. But how can we find it in surroundings that hardly make that easy? First, we need to recognize that inner peace is a gift, constantly waiting for us to receive it. The following suggestions are ways for us to open ourselves to receive that gift. Each is based on a theological understanding of who we are as human beings in relation to God.

### Centering Prayer

In one of my first books, *The Breath of God*, I offer my understanding of prayer as providing “breathing space” within ourselves for God's *ruach* (life-giving breath). Whether we use words, reflection, or silent presence (sometimes called contemplation, meditation, or centering prayer), we are opening ourselves to God. Prayer transforms our inner landscape because it welcomes God's healing, love, strength, and peace into our hearts, our souls, our psyches—our deepest self. I have found that centering prayer, prayer in which we are quietly attentive to God's

presence, has helped me exhale anxiety and inhale peace. Such prayer is like filling up a great reservoir with God's peace. I find that spending twenty minutes every morning in such prayer is a wonderful practice for surrendering our anxieties to God during the times of turbulence in our lives.

### Honoring the Body/Spirit Connection

As a musician and dancer, I experience the connection between my physical being and my spiritual self naturally. When I began to teach about prayer, I realized that this was not true for everyone. But whether we realize it or not, our spiritual and emotional states are deeply affected by our bodies. I talk about this in my new book, *Spiritual Exercises: Joining Body and Spirit in Prayer*. For example, wherever you are—standing in line at the bank and anxious because you might be late for an appointment—get *into* your body. Be aware of your weight on the floor as a sign of

your *adamah* (earthly self). Relax your diaphragm and invite oxygen to fill your lungs as you remember God's life-giving *ruach*, always with you, as natural as your inhaling and exhaling.

Caring for the body through proper nutrition and exercise helps open us to inner peace in at least two ways. One, I discovered that I can think of nothing but what I'm doing when I'm in a dance class. Focusing on what we're doing gives our anxiety muscles a rest! Yoga, Pilates, and t'ai chi are helpful in this way as well.

Second, exercise—especially aerobic exercise, such as brisk walking or bicycling—helps us use up the adrenalin produced by anxiety. Our bodies are hard-wired for action—fight or flight—when we feel threatened. Try exercising off the effects of extra anxiety and diffuse its energy, opening up to God's gift of inner peace.

### Understanding the Earth Itself as Healer

Many people connect their first childhood experiences of God





with the outdoors. For me, the top of the maple tree in our back yard was a holy place. As we grow older, we continue to be nurtured through connection with the natural world, as many gardeners can attest. When I am troubled, I find it calming to take a walk and immerse myself in the beauty and wonder of God's creation. The small delights of seeing a snow-covered branch, a spring violet, or a grazing deer can help lighten a heavy heart and prepare the way for God's gift of peace.

**Monitor the Imagination**

One of the drawbacks of being human is that we often worry too much. If you have a vivid imagination, the problem can be even worse. After September 11, 2001, I worried about our son and his family in New York to the point where I had to consciously tell my imagination, "Stop it!" Fretting brings no gain. Instead, we must fill our imaginations with positive images, by turning to Scripture, watching an uplifting play or a beautiful ballet, listening to Bach or Mozart, or reading a great novel. We should draw on the brain's capacity for order, reason, and logic to pull us out of emotional chaos.

**Holy Action**

I suspect that the secret of the apostles' ministries lay in the holy action that flowed from their sense of Christ's presence with them. The peace of God ideally takes us out of ourselves and into the world. Finding God's peace at our center gives us the desire and hope for peace in our world. The effect of inner peace is an outer life dedicated to the peace, justice, and love preached by Jesus. It is a blessed circle. As we live our lives in accordance with that message, our own inner peace will grow. And the more our own inner peace grows, the more effective we will be in contributing to peace and justice in our world—however we are called to do so, through family life, professional vocations, or political activism.

In John's Gospel, chapter 20, the disciples are pictured paralyzed with fear, huddled behind locked doors. Suddenly, Jesus stands among them and says, "Peace be with you." He shows them his hands and his side, and again says, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Then he breathes on them, with the words, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

For Christians, this passage is a recapitulation of the Hebrew creation story. This time, God's *ruach* is breathed not only into an individual, but into a community, reminding us that our solitary quest for inner peace is best sustained and encouraged by the company of others. This time it is the second Adam, the one who came to show us and tell us what God is like, who breathes on the disciples—and on us. Revealing his wounds, he shows them that the peace of God is both hidden and revealed in the strife of human life. Then he gives them the gift of the Spirit—the *ruach* of God—and charges them with a mission: Rather than keeping that Spirit to themselves, they are to find themselves and leave themselves by taking the love they have encountered in that small upper room out to the whole world.

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The Rev. Nancy Roth is an Episcopal priest, musician, dancer, and writer. She serves as chaplain to the spouses of the Episcopal bishops, is on faculty of the CREDO project for clergy, and conducts workshops and retreats. See [www.revnancyroth.org](http://www.revnancyroth.org).





HEALTH WISE

# Are You at Risk for Diabetes?

by Molly M. Ginty

**WHATEVER STAGE OF LIFE YOU'RE IN, AND WHETHER YOU'RE PHYSICALLY FIT OR LIVING WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS, YOU CAN FIND WAYS TO BE A WISE STEWARD OF YOUR HEALTH AND WELL-BEING. OUR HEALTH AND WHOLENESS ARE IMPORTANT KEYS TO RESPONDING TO GOD'S CALL FOR US AND ACTING BOLDLY ON THAT CALL. THAT'S WHY WOMEN OF THE ELCA HAVE EMBARKED ON A NEW HEALTH INITIATIVE FOR THE 2005-2008 TRIENNium: RAISING UP HEALTHY WOMEN AND GIRLS. THIS ONGOING COLUMN REPRESENTS OUR COMMITMENT TO THE ISSUE OF WOMEN'S HEALTH.**

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Nancy Gleeson never said no. When she saw sugar, she ate it, gorging on cookies, chocolate, and banana splits every day for decades. She didn't worry about the weight gain that left her tipping the scales at 225 pounds. She didn't heed the family history that put her at high risk for diabetes—until she wound up in the emergency room with debilitating fatigue and a blood sugar reading that was triple the norm.

"I didn't realize I had to take care of my body until it was nearly too late," says Gleeson, a Tulsa, Oklahoma, mother and one of the growing number of American women with diabetes, an incurable disease that wreaks havoc with the body's ability to unlock the energy in food.

Exacerbated by Americans' sedentary lifestyles and growing girths, diabetes is now at a record high the United States. It affects 9 percent of American women, and has become so widespread that one in three girls is likely to develop it during her lifetime.

"Diabetes is a silent killer," says Cathy Tibbetts, a spokesperson for the American Diabetes Association,

which has proclaimed November American Diabetes Month. "Because this disease can develop gradually with no obvious outward signs—and because poor health habits have become so commonplace—a third of the women who have diabetes don't even realize they are affected."

Diabetes strikes when the body fails to produce or process insulin, a hormone that is manufactured by the pancreas and that helps convert food into energy. Over time, the disease causes glucose or sugar to accumulate in the bloodstream instead of being used for fuel. This buildup causes excessive thirst, frequent urination, and physical exhaustion. It can also trigger secondary complications such as heart, eye, and kidney disease.

Depending on the symptoms and the age of onset, diabetes can fall into one of two categories. Type 1, in which the pancreas makes little or no insulin, usually starts in childhood and can be treated with injectable insulin. Type 2, in which the body is resistant to insulin, usually strikes in adulthood and can be treated with prescription medication.



Though both types are affected by genetic predisposition, health habits are more likely to trigger type 2. In recent decades, the incidence of type 2 has spiked dramatically. It now accounts for 95 percent of total cases.

Since two-thirds of American women are overweight and one-third are obese (figures that are slightly higher than those for men), women face a greater likelihood of developing both types of diabetes.

Health advocates estimate that nine million American women have diabetes—and that twenty million more have pre-diabetes: elevated blood sugar that puts them at risk for the full-fledged disease.

Conditions unique to women (such as polycystic ovarian syndrome or giving birth to a baby that weighs more than nine pounds) can increase their risk. Women are the only ones who develop gestational diabetes, a condition in which the hormones produced by the placenta interfere with insulin production in the mother, affecting 4 percent of pregnancies. With all types of diabetes, women are more likely than men to develop complications, including cardiovascular disease, reduced blood flow to the hands and feet, and damage to the nerves and heart.

Since women experience more fluctuations in the level of the hormone estrogen, which makes cells more receptive to insulin and thus lowers

blood sugar, women diabetics must monitor their glucose levels more carefully than male diabetics.

Given their special needs when it comes to diabetes, how can women protect themselves from this debilitating disease? Experts say women should be aware of their risk factors (being overweight and having a family history of the disease can double the risk). Women should get regular exercise, avoid smoking, monitor their blood pressure, and watch for such warning signs as frequent urination and insatiable thirst. Regular screenings, including a fasting blood glucose test at age forty-five and then every three years, are also important.

Health advocates say that if a woman does develop diabetes, she should follow the example set by Nancy Gleeson, who checks her blood sugar every morning, takes her medication twice daily as directed, shuns desserts, walks daily, and is now forty-five pounds slimmer than she was when diagnosed.

“Diabetes has likely shortened my life, but I’m determined to make my remaining years my healthiest,” says Gleeson. “This disease may be a silent killer, but it’s a killer we can work to control.”

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Molly M. Ginty lives in New York. Her work has appeared in *Ms.*, *Marie Claire*, *Redbook*, and *Women's eNews*.

Because this disease can develop gradually with no obvious outward signs—and because poor health habits have become so commonplace—a third of the women who have diabetes don't even realize they are affected.



# DANCING in the AISLE

by Kimberly Groninga



Carly and I arrived for worship just in time to see everybody walking down the sidewalk away from the church. In the center of the crowd, our pastor seemed taller than the rest—a shepherd in the middle of the flock.

We followed the crowd into a brick building on the campus three blocks away at Lutheran Campus Ministry. I must have missed an announcement.

Carly and I settled into folding chairs at the back of the room—she with a box of raisins and I with diaper bag, purse, and a handful of handouts. As I caught my breath, the service began, and Carly scrambled up to kneel on the seat of her chair. The folding chair started to buckle and as I caught Carly in mid-air, I pinched my finger. Hard.

While my eyes were squeezed shut in pain, I heard the rising up of a gentle voice—pure, sweet, unstudied. I opened my eyes to see a young woman singing at the front of the church. Then a cellist joined her and a young man with

a guitar. “Tar,” Carly shouted when he began to play, startling me back to the moment. “Like Daddy’s.” Finger to my lips, I told her to quiet down and listen. She quieted her voice, but she could not quiet her spirit. Climbing down off her chair, she walked into the aisle and began to dance. And she danced with a blissful grin on her face that closed her eyes.

Then my child took off up the aisle, and I had to run to catch her.

When we settled back into our seats, I gave up trying to follow the service. I obviously had to keep one eye on my daughter and didn’t have enough attention left to handle the bulletin, music, and announcements. Then our pastor got up to preach.

After the sermon, members of the congregation passed the peace. As I clasped the hand of the young man next to us, I recalled that he had been paying bills before the service and had spit into his palm and used his finger like

a paint brush to seal the envelopes.

Then we went up for communion and, not knowing if the campus pastor would give Carly a blessing, I lingered for a moment. Out popped Carly’s little hand and she said, “Bread, please.” So the pastor gave her some. Receiving the wine by intinction, I dipped my piece and passed quickly so Carly wouldn’t copy me. But as we filed back to our seats she announced, at a volume only two-year-olds can generate, “I need some dip.” I smiled back at the people who grinned at us, but I was embarrassed. I was embarrassed, and my finger hurt, and I missed most of the service, and our car was three blocks away, and I really wanted to wash my hand-shaking hand.

We finally got home about 12:30. “How was church?” my husband asked as we came in. “Don’t ask,” I said. “Waste of time.”

We had lunch. Carly napped. Tim and I read the paper and



puttered around the house. That afternoon, we took Carly to a deserted parking lot and taught her how to turn corners on her tricycle. We went out for ice cream and to the grocery store.

Rocking her before bed that evening, I asked her about her day. Did she have fun riding her trike? Yep. Did she like her ice cream cone? Yep. "What else did we do today?" I asked.

"I danced in church," she said,

with that blissful grin. "I danced in church, Mommy."

Waste of time, indeed!

I guess worship is not always about what we get out of it. Sometimes it is about what we bring. As Lutherans, we aren't likely to be dancing in the aisle. But perhaps what we can't bring our bodies to do, we can allow our hearts to do. Next week, I'm going to meet my daughter on the dance

floor. Next week, I'm bringing my dancing shoes.

Kimberly Groninga is a graduate student in English at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) and an adjunct instructor in English at both UNI and Wartburg College, Waverly, Iowa. She lives in Cedar Falls, Iowa, with her husband and daughter and is a member of Nazareth Lutheran.



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# Saints

by Patricia Lull

## Large "S" and Small



Almost every Sunday, the congregation with whom I worship prays for those who now praise God with the saints in heaven. Some Sundays, we are reminded of particular Saints whose work and witness continue to encourage Christians in the twenty-first century. Who are these saints and Saints, remembered in our liturgies and noted on the calendar of the church year?

From the very beginning of Christianity, the lives of remarkable teachers and witnesses to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ have been remembered by the faithful. Many of these Christians were martyrs, who died because of

their witness to the power of God at work in Jesus Christ.

Stephen, whose death is recorded in Acts 7, is the first of these Saints with a capital "S." Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are familiar to many because of the Gospels that bear their names. Such Saints as Mary Magdalene, Peter, Andrew, Paul, and Mary, the mother of our Lord, are known for their faith during the earliest years of the church, as told in the Gospel accounts.

Since those first exemplar Christians, the Christian faith has spread through the witness of one generation to another. Saint Paul remembered the mother and grandmother of Timothy, Eunice, and Lois, as being instrumental in forming the faith life of his young companion (2 Timothy 1:5).



Most of us can name particular people who have helped us grow into maturity in the faith given us in baptism. Parents or grandparents, a Sunday-school teacher or a camp director, a kindly neighbor or a co-worker, friends or pastors are often the small “s” saints we name when we tell our own faith story. Not well known like the remarkable witnesses we call Saints, these ordinary women and men—baptized into the one communion of saints—play a crucial role in encouraging our lives as Christians.

It is part of our humanity that we learn from the generations before us how to live our lives. When a particular person has played a formative leadership role for a community or city, his or her witness is remembered in ways that are almost larger than life. Even after the person has died, others remember the words that this leader said, the values embodied, the deeds done. When those leaders were Christians of remarkable influence as teachers, role models, or martyrs, they are revered as special models of the godly life.

As Lutheran Christians, we remember that one of the issues for people like us in the Reformation Era had to do with how the Saints were seen by some believers. At that time, some Christians were afraid to pray to God directly. Many ordinary people felt unworthy to approach one as powerful as God Almighty, and so they would ask the Saints to intercede for them.

The Reformers, including Luther, helped people understand that Jesus Christ is the only heavenly friend and mediator we need when we want to pray to God. While the Reformers discouraged the elaborate devotional customs that had sprung up around the Saints, they understood that we human beings can still learn much from the example of others. In particular, Saints who are

widely known and saints who are personally known remain excellent models and teachers of what it means to live by God's grace in every generation.

As might happen in any family or community, sometimes stories that are told and retold from generation to generation grow to outlandish proportions. The same is true of the stories of the multitude of Saints remembered around the world. It's not always possible to document precisely what a Christian did in the fourth century or even the sixteenth century. It's more important to think of the Saints as exemplars of the faith than to trust in small details of how their lives are remembered many years later. After all, the work of the saints, small “s” and large, is simply to point us to our Lord, Jesus Christ.

If you look in the front of *Lutheran Book of Worship*, you will find a calendar that lists lesser festivals and commemorations throughout the church year. These note dates on which we join other Christians in remembering the witness of all sorts of Saints and saints. The list includes hymn writers and nurses, mothers and missionaries, biblical characters and people who lived in our lifetime. The calendar covers the whole year to encourage us to learn about these diverse witnesses in worship in our congregations and in our personal devotions. Taken together, these lives represent the rich and varied ways in which the Christian people of God have witnessed to their faith in Jesus Christ for twenty centuries.

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Pastor Patricia Lull serves as dean of students at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn. Her own understanding of the communion of saints has been deepened through her involvement with the saints at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in St. Paul and the San Lucas Mission in San Lucas Toliman, Guatemala.



# In the Footsteps

## of Saints by Audrey Novak Riley

My favorite place of worship is filled with beautiful images of saints, heroes, and witnesses of faith. They are there in paintings and mosaics on the walls, stained-glass windows, and even photographs.

Among the dozens of people of faith depicted in that wonderful place, there are several who are special to me. They are examples, models of how to follow Christ. And they all followed Christ in different ways.

The woman in the mosaic over here was bold and brilliant, writing hundreds of letters to heads of church and state urging peace (she told a queen to cut it out: "like a sick and passionate woman, you let yourself be guided by your passions!"). More amazing, they listened to her. She was sent all over France and Italy to make peace among warring factions. Where did her boldness come from? She wrote, "I trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, not in myself." When I write a letter to my senators urging peace, I'm following the model of Catherine of Siena.

There's an old sepia photograph on a shelf over there. The woman in the photo was an immigrant to this country early in the last century and spent her life serving other immigrants. She fought to build hospitals and schools in the gritty neighborhoods where the new arrivals settled, and taught hundreds (thousands?) of children how to get along in their new country. This gifted teacher was famous for both her gentleness with students and her boldness with builders. We all know teachers who are tender

when tenderness is needed and tough when toughness is needed; they're following in the footsteps of Frances Cabrini.

This woman in the painting over here was known for her deep faith and her solid common sense. When someone acted shocked that such a holy woman could indulge herself in a luxurious meal (and clearly enjoy it), she answered, "There's a time for penance and a time for partridge." When we shake off a gloomy mood by taking a walk in the fresh air and sunshine, we're following this woman's advice. On a more spiritual note, she believed that the most powerful prayer is the one that leads to action, and she acted on that belief. Teresa of Avila, renewer of the church, had her feet on the ground and her heart in heaven.

There are more, many more, all examples of faith and love in action.

These paintings, mosaics, stained-glass windows, and photographs are reminders, visible memories for the community that gathers in that place, a collection of inspiring memories displayed on the walls and in the windows. Each one of us has a similar collection in the church of our hearts, thoughts and memories of people who show us how to follow Christ. Who are the saints and witnesses on the walls and windows of your heart?

And in whose heart are you one of the witnesses enshrined on the walls and windows?

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Audrey Novak Riley is the associate editor of this magazine. She sings in her church choir and gazes at the paintings and mosaics and stained-glass windows when her attention wanders during the sermon.



# ACTION & ADVOCACY GUIDE

## **Leap of Faith** (page 8)

This month's Mothering Seasons contributor, the Rev. Mary C. Lindberg, has edited a book designed to help families and churches consider the spiritual implications of adopting across cultures. *Weaving God's Love across Cultures: Transracial Adoption and Faith* includes moving stories by adopted people and adoptive parents. The experiences of their lives honestly reveal the joy and pain that unfold through the process of adopting and being adopted. Available from Augsburg Fortress at [www.augsburgfortress.org](http://www.augsburgfortress.org)

## **Peace in a Time of Anxiety** (page 10)

Episcopal priest Nancy Roth has written several books that are available online and at local book stores. Her latest are *Spiritual Exercises: Joining Body and Spirit in Prayer* and *An Invitation to Christian Yoga* (both Church Publishing, 2005). More information is available on her Web site: [www.revnancyroth.org](http://www.revnancyroth.org).

## **Health Wise: Are You at Risk for Diabetes?** (page 14)

The American Diabetes Association offers resources for people with all types of diabetic and pre-diabetic conditions as well as links to educational and advocacy opportunities ([www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)). Information about diabetes can also be found on the Web site of the U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services National Diabetes Education Program ([www.ndep.nih.gov](http://www.ndep.nih.gov)).

## **A Hospital with Heart** (page 26)

Currently, the Augusta Victoria Hospital is a tax-exempt organization. The State of Israel is seeking to revoke that tax-exempt status. Delegates to the Sixth Triennial Convention of Women of the ELCA convention asked that the executive director and all women write to U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to request the U.S. government's help in preventing the revocation of the hospital's tax exemption by the State of Israel. The hospital in Jerusalem is operated by the Lutheran World Federation. The taxes that would be incurred would severely impact the hospital's ability to serve Palestinians. A letter and address are available for download at the ELCA's e-advocacy Web site at [www.elca.org/advocacy](http://www.elca.org/advocacy).

## **Peace Not Walls— Stand for Justice in the Holy Land** (page 28)

Join others in the ELCA and around the world in prayer that peace with justice will flourish in the Holy Land. Sign up for the Prayer Vigil and pray in your congregation, your circle, your family, or your staff that walls of fear and concrete will come down. Prayer Vigil and other prayer and worship resources are found at [www.elca.org/middleeast](http://www.elca.org/middleeast). Or call 800-638-3522 ext. 6466 or 2635.

**ECUMENICAL PRAYER CYCLE**—The World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Prayer Cycle ([www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/news/01-02.html](http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/news/01-02.html)) enables us to journey in prayer through every region of the world and through every week of the year affirming our solidarity with Christians all over the world, brothers and sisters living in diverse situations, experiencing diverse problems, and sharing diverse gifts. In addition to praying for women in Mauritania, please pray this month for people working for peace in the following countries:

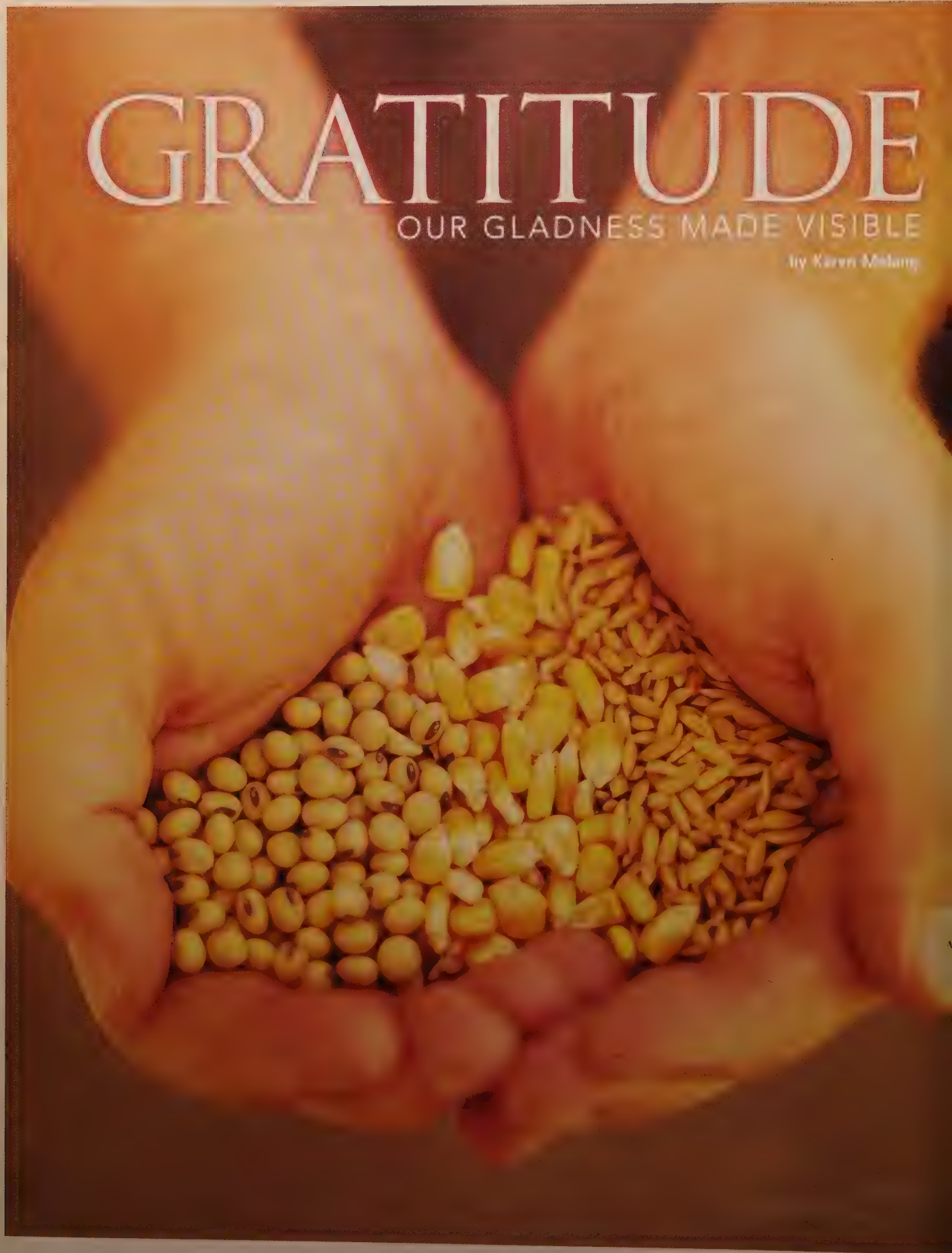
Republic of Congo | Gabon, Sao Tomé, and Príncipe | Cameroon | Central African Republic  
Equatorial Guinea | Burkina Faso | Chad | Mali | Niger | Liberia | Sierra Leone



# GRATITUDE

OUR GLADNESS MADE VISIBLE

by Karen Melang





I'M NOT SURE, BUT I THINK I MIGHT HAVE GRATITUDE DEFICIT DISORDER. I CAN'T SEEM TO MANAGE TO BE THANKFUL FOR ANY SUSTAINED AMOUNT OF TIME.

**CASE IN POINT:** Recently my husband began having a fairly minor health issue that we thought should be checked out. An examination was performed and further tests were ordered, but the doctor seemed confident about what the results would be.

He was wrong. The outcome of the test wasn't what he expected. A "mass" was spotted, and more tests were ordered.

From the moment I heard the word "mass" on Monday until we received the results of the more intensive testing on Thursday, I was in nearly constant contact with God. "Let Jim be okay, God." "I couldn't bear to be without him, God." "I don't think I could handle this, God." "What are you thinking, God? I was counting on many more years with him." "We haven't even gone on our dream trip yet, God." *"Do something, God!"*

Then came Thursday and the wonderful phone call from Jim. "Everything is okay. What they

saw is completely normal. I don't even need another office visit."

Don't get me wrong—I thanked God. We both thanked God. We talked about how someday in the not too distant future we will more than likely have to face losing each other. We mulled over what we learned from what turned out to be a non-event. We said that we were enormously grateful that things turned out the way they did and that we felt stronger and more able to trust God because of this occurrence.

This end of our experience—the gratitude part—took hours, not days. And then we went right back to taking our health for granted.

See what I mean about a gratitude deficit?

About a dozen years ago, I had the privilege of being a Women of the ELCA "Woman to Woman" visitor to the women's organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon. When I came back, I managed to be grateful for a couple of weeks. I was thankful for my bright and shiny

kitchen with all my amazing appliances (ah, the glorious beauty of my refrigerator—ice, whenever I want it!), my car, my phone, not to even mention my clean drinking water and my ability to read. Yes, I had a modestly prolonged season of gratitude after that visit. Two, maybe three weeks.

Then back to my rut. My life is good. I have everything I need and a lot of what I want, except perhaps another pair of shoes. I really need something to go with my new holiday outfit. (You see how fast items on my list move from *want* to *need*.)

Our culture works tirelessly at keeping us discontented, and most of the time we go along gladly in the pursuit of more, new, and different. Under the influence of advertising, I come to believe that my hopelessly outdated television with the (relatively) teeny-weeny screen has got to go. How can I be happy with only one kind of ketchup when I can get it hot, spicy, chipotle, and even blue? It isn't just that there are



several major brands of mayonnaise. Why be content with regular when it can come with honey mustard, horseradish, and who knows what all else?

We are constantly being pushed to the newest, the most “loaded,” the biggest. “Do you want to super-size it?” we are asked. Of course we do. We don’t even know *enough* when we see it.

The underlying message of our discontented society is that the stuff we have is not good enough, and that, in fact, very likely we are not good enough either. Feeling inadequate, holding onto stuff that’s always a bit dated, slightly too small, no longer quite fashionable, we are not very likely to feel grateful.

In such a world, St. Paul’s statement, “I have learned to be content with whatever I have” (Philippians 4:11b) is bold and shocking. “I know what it is to have little,” Paul continues, laying opposites side by side, “and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need.”

What’s the big secret to having plenty, we might ask. Of course, no one doubts that being in need presents genuine problems. Inadequate shelter, running out

of money for food, not having enough beds for everyone—these are the draining and harrowing circumstances of poverty. But having plenty—how hard can that be?

The secrets of going hungry and being in need are likely far worse than those of us who have never experienced them will ever know. But being well-fed and having plenty have challenges and temptations of their own.

When I have plenty, I am tempted to take all that I have for granted. Only when Jim’s health seemed to be in danger did I count it an astonishing gift. Only if my job is unfulfilling and irritating do I remember that wise bosses, congenial co-workers, and satisfying work are profound blessings.

When I have plenty, I am tempted to believe that I have fashioned my life myself and that I can take full credit for it. It’s easy to forget all the shoulders I am standing on: my loving and faithful parents and family, mentors too numerous to mention, heroes and heroines from long ago whose biographies provide instruction and patterns for my own life. I am tempted to believe that my usually sunny disposition is due to virtue rather than to the

gift of good genetic material and favorable circumstances.

When I have plenty, it is incredibly easy to forget that I am on the receiving end of everything I have and am. Behind all that I have, “body and soul . . . food and clothing, home and family, daily work and all that I need” (in the words of Luther’s *Small Catechism*), stands God, the grand Giver of it all, with hands full to overflowing of even more.

It is not so easy to be good at having plenty. I think the secret is to keep your eye on that grand Giver, rather than worrying about feeling grateful. When we try to manufacture gratitude, we usually end up with some version of a less than heartfelt Christmas thank-you note from a nine-year-old: “Dear Aunt Sylvia, thank you for the red socks. They are just what I wanted.”

When my little brother Phil was about five years old, his hero was our big brother Paul who played high school football. That fall, Paul earned his varsity letter. Our mom sewed the big “L” on Paul’s varsity letter sweater, which athletes wore all those years ago. Phil thought Paul and the sweater were both fantastic.

When Christmas Eve came, Phil opened a package and found a miniature letter sweater just

his size. A million dollars could not have thrilled him more. Now he could be just like his big brother Paul.

Our mother had searched all over town for a small version of the “L” so she could make Phil a sweater like Paul’s. The look on Phil’s face when he opened the present was all the thanks anyone needed, but it is my mother’s generosity that I remember most. The giver stays in my mind far more than the gift. Mom gave Phil what no one else would have thought to give him, something beyond his imagining. He was glad down to his toes.

The first Pentecost people were glad, too. “Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple,” St. Luke tells us, “they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts . . .” (Acts 2:46).

Most of us will be eating a festive meal with other people this Thanksgiving. There will likely be a golden turkey and a special stuffing or two with wild rice or oysters. Perhaps there will be orange-cranberry relish, jewel-toned and just tart enough. Of course, we will try to save room for pie, pumpkin or pecan, and we will eat a sliver even if we haven’t saved room.

If we are very blessed, we will be surrounded by people we love who love us back. They will remember how we used to be and recall things that happened long ago. We will all tell stories that are mostly true. We might laugh until our sides ache, and we might pass babies around or chase toddlers. Perhaps we’ll play cards or look at Christmas catalogs, and later we’ll eat turkey sandwiches and leftovers. And even if there are a few awkward moments we hadn’t expected (Grandma’s new husband cheats at cards!), we will be glad.

Contented gladness is one sort of gratitude to the Giver of all things, the Maker of heaven and earth. As we look around our tables, we may come to understand that more than bloodlines and gene pools hold us together, that we are bound by more than old jokes and drawing names for Christmas. At Thanksgiving, perhaps more than any other time of year, we remember that we are, all of us, the glorious creations of an endlessly imaginative God, glad recipients of all life has to offer.

Gladness grows naturally into generosity. Giving is the perfect way to handle the problem of plenty. Glad hearts know that you don’t have to hold onto everything for dear life, since dear life,

like daily bread, comes to us fresh every day from God, the true Owner of everything that is. We who have received all that we have from God can afford to be boldly openhanded, too.

Knowing that we are not self-made, we understand that we are merely passing along gifts we have received, not giving away things we actually own. Perhaps we will have as much fun giving as God seems to. Letter sweaters, secret Santa goodies, checks to Lutheran World Relief, knitted socks and mittens, year-round proportional giving, our precious time and energy, and a hundred other gifts make our gladness visible.

I have a gratitude deficiency, that’s for certain. All eternity will not be enough time to offer all the thanks God deserves. But I don’t think I will worry so much about my end of things. Perhaps if I keep my eyes firmly on the grand Giver, at least occasionally I will be overwhelmed by such breathtaking generosity and be moved, in my own small way, to imitate it. Now that’s thanksgiving.

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**Karen Melang is the executive director of Fremont Area Habitat for Humanity, Fremont, Nebraska. She is a member of the Lutheran Deaconess Conference, class of '71.**





# A HOSPITAL WITH **HEART**

by Karin A. Brown

**B**efore the sun rises over Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley, a hospital van has already set out for the Palestinian town of Hebron to bring ten children to Augusta Victoria Hospital for their dialysis treatment.

These children have kidney failure and must come to Jerusalem three times a week for the tiring four-hour treatment available only at this Lutheran World Federation hospital. The van service for the children and their families was arranged by the hospital because of the current political situation that severely restricts Palestinians' movement. Patients often have a difficult time reaching the hospital in East Jerusalem due to Israeli security checkpoints that separate towns and the scarcity of permits required to enter Jerusalem.

Energy and brightness fill the van in the early morning light as more children climb in at several stops along the way. The van service means a comfortable and relatively stress-free ride for the children who move through the checkpoints as a group without much delay. Once at the hospital, the children settle into their chairs as they greet the nurses whom they have come to know so well over the months and years of their treatment.

A sense of family is apparent among the patients and staff.

*Right: Amirah, age nine, suffers from leukemia. This day she and the other children in the pediatric unit play with balloon animals.*

*Far right: Muna, age eleven, and Haddiyah, age thirteen, are both kidney failure patients and share a room during their dialysis treatment. While still attached to their machines, the girls dance to music on the radio.*



**THE SIXTH TRIENNIAL CONVENTION OF WOMEN OF THE ELCA** voted in July 2005 to act boldly to help Augusta Victoria Hospital. Currently, the hospital is a tax-exempt organization. The State of Israel is seeking to revoke that tax-exempt status. Delegates to the convention asked that the executive director and all women write to U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to request the U.S. government's help in preventing the revocation of the hospital's tax exemption by the State of Israel. The hospital in Jerusalem is operated by the Lutheran World Federation. The taxes that would be incurred would severely impact the hospital's ability to serve Palestinians. A letter and address are available for download at the ELCA's e-advocacy Web site at [www.elca.org/advocacy](http://www.elca.org/advocacy).

During their treatment, the children play games together, draw, sing, and dance; though after just fifteen minutes of dancing, the children are noticeably tired and lean quietly back in their chairs to rest. Each day brings surprises for these young patients. Some days are really good while others are much harder, but the children are still able to go forward with smiles.

In the summer of 2004, I volunteered at Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH), which primarily serves Palestinian refugees—people who would otherwise not be able to find or afford good health care. I spent time talking with and photographing patients there—trying to reveal the faces and human stories of those who receive care from this remarkable hospital. The collection of personal stories and pictures is being used to help raise money for the hospital by showing donors more than just statistics. I talked and played

with dialysis patients under the age of twelve. I toured village health clinics and visited with people who were too sick to leave their homes. I talked with cancer patients both young and old.

I thought I would be the one providing a service by helping raise awareness and money for the hospital. But as I spent time with the children and the older patients, I was amazed by their resilience and high spirits that gave them and those around them strength to make it to the next day. More than facing crippling illnesses, they are forced to deal with these illnesses in the context of a political and social situation that permeates their daily activities. Every day, they wonder if they will make it to the hospital for their next visit or if they will die trying. I saw life and energy in the eyes of children who are terminally ill and living through a war. Though I was the one who came to offer assistance, the

children left more of an impression on me than I could have on them.

I was back in Jerusalem for the summer of 2005. The AVH now has several large buses that safely transport patients and hospital staff past the checkpoints and the Israeli Separation Wall each day to the hospital and then back home again. You can read more about the AVH in the Lutheran World Federation Jerusalem Program's 2004 Annual Report. Go to [www.LWFJerusalem.org](http://www.LWFJerusalem.org) for further information.

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Karin A. Brown is a senior at Juniata College in Huntingdon, Penn., and a member of the Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem. She volunteered during the summer of 2004 at AVH and served as an intern during the summer of 2005 with a non-governmental organization that is doing emergency assistance work in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.





by Suad Younan

# ACTING BOLDLY IN PEACE

Every time I see an ambulance racing down the street or hear its siren, I am in anguish, knowing that the person inside is likely another victim of the ongoing violence in our region of south Jerusalem. In many cases, the victim is an innocent bystander, shot in a military raid on a West Bank neighborhood. We live near the seam that supposedly joins—but in reality separates—this city and Bethlehem, Beit Jala, and Beit Sahour (Shepherd's Field), and thus near the wall being built by the Israeli government to separate Palestinians and Israelis. Palestinians and Israelis in Jerusalem live in different worlds, and many are indifferent to each other. They have created artificial enclaves, encouraged by the Israeli government's policy of segregation. Still, I am constantly amazed at the capacity of people to be oblivious to the pain in the eyes of women and men who are detained by soldiers at bus stops simply because of who they are.



## ABOUT THE WALL

In June 2002, the government of Israel began construction of a multi-billion-dollar "security barrier" intended to stop terrorist attacks on the country. At about 26 feet tall, this barrier is twice the height of the Berlin Wall. When completed, it will be about 454 miles long. The government argues that the wall will protect Israel against terrorists, but at many points it is constructed within Palestinian territory, sometimes

miles from Israel's internationally recognized borders.

## CALL TO ACTION

The ELCA's companion, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, has declared the situation extremely urgent and called upon the ELCA to join in saying *no* to the construction of this barrier on Palestinian land. At the 2005 Churchwide Assembly, the ELCA voted to launch a special

I live in a world where hundreds of people look past each other daily, and I ask myself: What can I do to retain the compassion I feel for others? Even if we take pity on a stranger's pain, we fail to do anything to show that we care. Instead, we withdraw because she is not one of us.

Resolving conflict in such an environment is difficult. Concern about justice, conflict resolution, and reconciliation is shared by many people and groups in my country. We have chosen to look into the lives and worlds of so-called enemies, to see their truths, justices, and injustices, and to offer empathy. These groups that work toward peace vary from ultra-political to apolitical, from

secular to religious. Yet they have a common denominator: a desire for human, social, and political justice, especially now, when there is a great deal of talk about peace, but violence is everywhere.

#### **WOMEN COMING TOGETHER FOR PEACE**

As a woman involved in human rights advocacy, I often ask myself these questions:

- How can we so easily talk about peace while people suffer oppression, injustice, and loss of loved ones?
- How can I, as a Christian woman, preach about reconciliation when feelings of rage, defeat, restlessness, and fatalism tear me apart and weaken my faith?

- How can I develop a deeper attachment to my religious life and identity as a Christian woman and to my national identity as a Palestinian?

For the past four years, I have been a member of a women's interfaith group that meets every three weeks. The presence of committed women who can discuss, criticize, and contribute to positive and realistic assessments of our situation is vital, especially when we talk in terms of living our faith.

I have come to realize that unless Palestinians and Israelis understand that, as human beings, we live similar lives and share similar concerns, our attachment to our identities, national and religious,

campaign, "Peace Not Walls—Stand for Justice in the Holy Land." The campaign calls for an immediate halt to the construction of the wall and for the removal of those portions built on Palestinian land. It also asked ELCA congregations, members, and synods to take action on this issue. This structure endangers the future of the region's Christian community. It also undermines the "two-state solution" advocated by President Bush in the Roadmap

for Peace, which calls for an independent, viable Palestinian state living side-by-side in peace with a secure Israeli state.

#### **CHURCHES AND THE WALL**

Christians believe that God breaks down dividing walls of hostility and works for reconciliation among people (Ephesians 2). The Lutheran church in the Holy Land carries out its ministry serving communities surrounded by concrete walls and

barbed-wire fences that increasingly divide and dispossess the people. This companion church has stressed the urgency of the problem as construction of the wall in and around Bethlehem and Jerusalem undermines the church's ministries.

Here are some things you and your congregation can do to join the Peace Not Walls campaign.

#### **PRAY**

Join others in the ELCA and around



is superficial and meaningless. In our interfaith group, we keep the following questions in mind:

- Are we doing anything to eliminate violence?
- How can we put right the injustices perpetuated by people, media, ideologies, and so forth?
- How can we translate the facts stories, and wisdom we are discovering into social and political action?
- How can women help educate our communities about the social and moral costs of conflict?

#### **GOD IS DOING SOMETHING NEW**

The degree to which political, cultural, and historical differences isolate our communities from each other is unimaginable. And

the wall being built is reinforcing that isolation. Some exclusivist groups see the concrete barrier as the only way to preserve their own existence. Others believe isolation from each other breeds national arrogance and supremacist attitudes, which our religious heritages abhor and denounce.

For people separated by religious, national, and now physical barriers to cooperate with each other, we must believe not only in hope for the future, but that God is doing something new in our land. This conviction leads us toward transformation—into a way of life that is more responsible, a way of life that is capable of greater interdependence.

As women committed to step-

ping beyond boundaries that separate our communities, we are attempting to recognize, then release prejudices. We are also learning to question what have been our absolute truths and consider the truth of others.

Paving the way for reconciliation is a bold act of peace-building. Bold action means entering into the damaged world of so-called enemies, suspending judgment, learning, and struggling to bring hope to those who are destitute.

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Suad Younan is principal of Helen Keller School for the Blind and wife of the Rev. Munib Younan, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. They live in Jerusalem.

the world in prayer that peace with justice will flourish in the Holy Land. Sign up for the Prayer Vigil and pray in your congregation, your circle, your family, or your staff that walls of fear and concrete will come down. Prayer Vigil and other prayer and worship resources are found at [www.elca.org/peacenotwalls](http://www.elca.org/peacenotwalls).

#### **SPEAK OUT**

Call or write to President Bush. The phone number for the White House is

202-456-1111. Find a sample letter at [www.elca.org/peacenotwalls](http://www.elca.org/peacenotwalls).

Ask the president to call upon the State of Israel to cease construction of the separation wall and to remove all existing portions of this wall from Palestinian land.

Express your concern about the impact of the wall on Palestinian communities and churches, as well as on schools, students, and teachers who are cut off from

one another in Jerusalem and Bethlehem neighborhoods.

Point out that the wall impedes access by Palestinians to vital health care.

Sign up for easy e-Advocacy. Find out how at [www.elca.org/advocacy](http://www.elca.org/advocacy).

#### **RESOURCES AND INFORMATION**

To learn about the situation in the Middle East, go to [www.elca.org/peacenotwalls](http://www.elca.org/peacenotwalls) or call 800-638-3522 ext. 6466 or 2635.



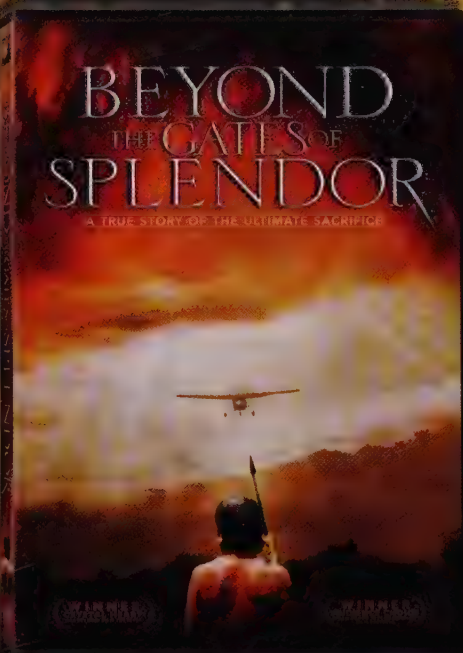
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## Session 3

# Act Boldly in Peace

by Sue Gamelin

## Bold, Peaceful Acts: An Oxymoron?

Can actions be both bold and peaceful? Aren't these two concepts at war with one another? Aren't they an oxymoron, like jumbo shrimp?

When we think of boldness, we might think of a general leading his tank division at top speed toward the enemy. But boldness doesn't have to be like that.

In this series on acting boldly, we have been considering two ways that people in the Bible act boldly. One is the boldness Peter had when he walked on water (Matthew 14:28–33). This is the kind of boldness that grows out of our understanding that God is at work in our lives and that we can boldly stride forward—even if we're afraid we might fail. The Greek word *talmao* (tol-MAH-oh) is used to name boldness carried out with fear and, sometimes, sinking.

A second kind of boldness is named by the Greek word *parrhesia* (par-ray-SEE-ah). This is the kind of boldness that springs out of conviction so strong that nothing can hold it back. This is a passionate boldness, like that of Miriam dancing before the people of Israel on the far side of the Red Sea after escaping Pharaoh's army (Exodus 15:20–21). This boldness bursts forth fearlessly.

This session focuses on acting boldly with another of the nine fruits of the Spirit that Paul names in Galatians 5:22–23. Previously we talked about acting boldly with love and acting boldly in joy. Now we turn to the third benefit, peace.

Let's dig into what Paul might have meant when he chose the Greek word *eirene* (eye-RAY-nay) to name one fruit of the Spirit. We translate this word as "peace." *Eirene* describes both a benevolent and well-run society and a benevolent and well-run inner life. *Eirene* is the word that is most often used to translate the Hebrew word *shalom* (shah-LOAM) into Greek. Both words, *eirene* and *shalom*, speak of the well-being that grows out of right relationship with God, with God's children, and with ourselves. *Eirene*, *shalom*, peace is what we extend to each other at worship when we turn to each other with a smile and a hand extended. We wish one another the peace of being in right relationship with our Creator, with one another, and within our inner beings. How rich this is!

But let's go back to our initial question. Can we act boldly in peace?

## LET'S TALK ABOUT PEACEFUL BOLDNESS

- Tell about a time when you danced for joy and startled yourself with your boldness.
- Think about someone who seems to be a person of deep peace. Talk about that person with the group.
- When has your peaceful boldness failed you and you've found yourself sinking in the waters of conflict and argument?

## Two Bold—Peaceful?—Women

I've known quite a few women named Irene, a name derived from the Greek word *eirene*, but I haven't met many named after the two heroes of Exodus 1:15–22, Shiprah and Puah. Shiprah means “fair one.” Puah, it is thought, comes from the Ugaritic word for “girl.”

Shiprah and Puah were midwives for the Hebrew people during their enslavement by a cruel Egyptian king, or pharaoh, who didn't know about Joseph and the favor with which previous pharaohs had regarded the Israelites. Were these midwives Hebrews themselves, or Egyptian women who served the Hebrews as midwives? We don't know. But what we do know is that they were bold.

One sign of that boldness is that we know their names. Many women in the Bible are unnamed. Another sign of their boldness is that they were called into the presence of the king of Egypt himself (vv. 15, 18–19). How many kings call for meetings with women who are midwives to slave laborers of an oppressed ethnicity?

But the greatest sign of the boldness of Shiprah and Puah is their defiance of the king's direct order. What was that order? “When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live” (v. 16). We know that Pharaoh was greatly mistaken about the unimportance of women and girls; otherwise his order might have included all the Hebrew babies. He certainly didn't know his listeners, the two bold midwives standing before him. Shiprah and Puah neither feared him nor honored his command. Instead, they respected God and honored God's command. “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be

fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it’” (Genesis 1:27–28a). They chose God's rule, not the king's. They chose to be in right relationship with God, not in right relationship with this king. In the biblical account, they are the first people to rebel against this cruel and unjust king. And in doing so, they risk their lives.

Their second audience with the king is delightful, though it shouldn't be. The king has heard that contrary to his direct order, there are still Hebrew boys coming into the world. Our heroines, Shiprah and Puah, stand before the king with this news hanging in the air. The king no doubt snarls as he asks, “Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?” (Exodus 1:18)

Were the midwives' knees knocking? When our new assisting minister was told that her first service would be recorded, she said to watch out for a clicking sound on the tape—the knocking of her knees. Did the midwives' knees knock, or did the women answer with the joyful confidence with which Mary sang her Magnificat (Luke 1:46–56)? We don't know if they were bold with *talmao* boldness or bold with *parrhesia* boldness. We do know that they were bold.

The midwives' response to the king is wonderful. Why are boy babies still alive? “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them” (Exodus 1:19). The Hebrew mothers' labor was different than mine when I had my four babies: I needed lots of help for hours and hours. Actually, the Hebrew women probably did too. But these bold midwives stood before the king representing God's will, not the king's.

Bold they were. And peacemakers, too. Remember that the Hebrew word *shalom* and the Greek word *eirene* name the peace that comes from being



in right relationship with God, with God's children, and with ourselves. Shiphrah and Puah had that kind of peace as they defied the king's order. They had that bold peace as they waited by the birthstools of the Hebrew women. They had that bold peace as they stood together united in their birthing not only of babies but also of the freedom of Israel in the face of oppression. Shiphrah and Puah acted boldly in peace.

That's not the end of the story. "God dealt well with the midwives" (Exodus 1:20). What does it mean to have God deal with us? In my calling as a pastor, I have had the honor to sit with people who know that God is dealing with them. Some have come to me as part of a twelve-step program that asks them to confess their failings to someone and seek forgiveness. How awesome it is to hear someone confess the many times they were not faithful to God, to God's children, or to themselves. Others come to talk about a decision that they know ran contrary to their understanding of what it means to be in right relationship to God, to God's children, and themselves. They find that not only their past but their present and future are weighed down with the consequences of these decisions. These burdened ones come to repent, seek forgiveness, amend their lives, and make restitution so that the wholeness of *shalom* can be theirs. Coming forward is a bold act, an act in search of peace. God is dealing with them.

## Ron

I visit Ron in prison. God has been dealing with him, too. He is more than half-way through a 14- to 17-year term. I look forward to our visits and his smile when I enter the room where we are allowed to talk. As we talk, we sip the ice-cold cans of iced tea that Ron has brought for us. His resources are slender; giving a can of iced tea is as generous for him as giving a gourmet meal at a fine restaurant for someone else. Ron has

found peace in prison. It wasn't easy. First, there is the memory of what sent him there. He drunkenly drove down the wrong side of a highway one night, and three people died. It hurts each time he thinks about that. The past is painful. His present is painful, too. The broken, troubled people around him in prison are difficult to live with, and the setting isn't pleasant. Finally, there are worries about the future—where he'll be sent next, when he'll be up for parole, and how he'll pay for the three funerals still on his bill.

But Ron has found peace. He's the first person I've visited in jail who understands that he is guilty. He's eager to talk about his growth in faith and his understanding of Jesus' forgiveness of him, even though his sin and crime were heinous. He grieves for those he killed and has written to tell their families so. He has offered his witness in a film about the dangers of drinking and driving for young people in driver's education classes and for those convicted of drunk driving.

He yearns to pay for the funerals, not only to clear his bill, but also to make amends. He longs to be released when he has paid his penalty; he longs to be born again into the world. He longs to assume the role of a responsible citizen.

Ron has been restoring a right relationship with God, with God's children, and with himself. In prison, he acts boldly, in peace.

Ron, Shiphrah, and Puah have been rewarded for their bold acts in peace. The midwives knew the joy of families of their own. Ron knows the joy of being reborn as a responsible member of the family of God.

Pharaoh looked for another way to destroy all the Hebrew boys. "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile," he told all the people, "but you shall let every girl live." He still didn't get it, did he? You go, Shiphrah and Puah! You go, Moses!

### **Additional Study: Right Relationship and Eirene**

If you have time, delve into some of the other stories about childbirth in the Bible. Look for signs of women acting boldly, in peace.

Consider the story of Elizabeth and Zechariah (Luke 1:5–15, 24–25). See how Elizabeth seeks the blessing of a child through right relationship with God, with God's children, and with herself, or, as the Gospel says, by being righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments. Elizabeth acted boldly, in peace.

Turn to the story of Mary in Luke 1:26–56. Unlike Elizabeth, Mary had not been longing for pregnancy. She is amazed to find that soon there will be a child—and what a child!—growing in her womb. It will be a scandal for this young, not-yet-married woman. Yet Mary is bold in her ready acceptance of the Prince of Peace being conceived within her. “Here am I, the servant of the Lord,” she cries out. “Let it be with me according to your word” (v. 38).

Mary is the first to fit Jesus' definition of who is blessed (11:27–28). Jesus offered it in response to the shout of a woman in the cheering crowd around him. She called, “Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!” That's not a commonly heard cheer these days, but it was then. The surprise is that Jesus called back, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!”

What good news this is, both for the mother who bore him and for those of us who do not bear children. God's blessing is upon those who live in right relationship with God, right relationship with each other, and right relationship with themselves. Mary acted boldly, in peace, in *shalom*, in *eirene*.

### **LET'S TALK ABOUT SHIPHRAH AND PUAH**

- Why was the king threatened by the birth of Hebrew boys?
- What could have made the king call two humble midwives into his presence, not once but twice?
- Who would have had to collude in the midwives' plan to let the Hebrew boys live?

### **LET'S TALK ABOUT OURSELVES**

- When have you stood before a person of authority and known that your life as God's child meant that you could not do what they were asking?
- What is struggling to be born in your life? How are you helping it to be brought forth? What bold action is required?
- Where is your greatest need for peace? Is it in your relationship with God, in your relationship with God's children, or in your own being?

### **LET'S TALK**

- Think back over the events of the past week. Have you experienced a moment of peace in the midst of everything else? Tell the group about it by completing the sentence, “I felt peaceful when . . .”



## LET'S TALK FURTHER

- Do you think that our society places value on women according to whether or not they bear children? Or on how many children they have?
- When have you been surprised to hear your voice volunteering to do something you hadn't planned to do? Was it because you understood God to be at work in the possibilities?
- Describe to someone else the peace you feel when you are doing something God's way.

## WHEN DO WE KNOW PEACE

- Do you sometimes allow yourself to sit still, enveloped by silence, open to God, even when there is work left to be done?
- Have you ever called or sent a note to someone with whom relationships were strained and asked for time to talk?
- Have you ever held the newspaper in your hands and prayed for every brokenness described in it?
- Have you ever sat down with your grown son or daughter, shared the mistakes you both made during the growing-up years, and asked forgiveness of each other?
- Does your congregation have healing services? Talk with your pastor about when the next will be, and offer to help.
- Have you considered memorizing a Bible passage to guide you through a challenging time?
- Who at work or school or in your circle seems to be distressed? Be a prayer partner, even if you don't know what the source of the distress is.

## Another Story: A Baby Boy and His Two Mothers

The two women stood in an anteroom of the orphanage, their tears blessing the head of the little child tucked into the warm space between their hearts as they embraced. Two mothers. One baby. A family new to this child ringed the three of them and wept, too—a father, a sister, a brother, a grandfather, and a grandmother. I was that weeping grandma. Standing by with love in her eyes was our translator and guide, a nurse at the orphanage in Sri Lanka.

We had learned the story of the first mother, his birth mother, who was giving away her baby because she knew it was the right thing to do for him, for her, and for her family. When she learned that she was pregnant, she moved to the orphanage, not wanting to shame her family. She was unmarried and had become pregnant through a liaison with a married man, a man she never told about her pregnancy. She could see no alternative to adoption. For a painful month after the birth, she stayed at the orphanage at the urging of the nurses to breast-feed the little one and give him a healthy start. Then she left, weeping bitter tears of loss.

Two months later, his second mother, his mother by adoption, learned that a boy had been born and was allocated to her family. That's when the tears began for her and the rest of the family. These tears were tears of joy. We had waited years for this baby. We did not know his name, history, anything. All we knew was that he was alive and waiting for us. We all began to love him. We loved him through all the bureaucratic maneuverings that took up the next three months. Then we flew to Sri Lanka and met him and his birth mother. Two mothers with one child between them as they embraced and wept. Two bold women in search of peace.

God says in the beginning of the 46th chapter of Isaiah, "Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the

remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, even when you turn gray I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and [I] will save" (vv. 3-4). Whose child is this boy, after all? Who is the mother, the father? Those of us who have had children know the humble wonder of having brought forth something so miraculous, so awesome, so astoundingly beautiful that only God could have formed this amazing creature in our wombs. "I have made and I will bear; I will carry and [I] will save," God promises. This little child, this tiny boy nestled between two weeping women does not belong to either one of them. This beautiful child is God's, always has been, always will be.

What about these two women, these two mothers?

"Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb?" God asks in Isaiah 49:15. No. The birth mother will not forget this tiny one who wriggled in her womb, tugged at her breast for milk, and fell asleep in her lap. She will not forget him; she weeps for her loss even as she does what she knows is best for him. She

weeps as she gives him to another mother and to the family around her. But there is God's promise for this birth mother. "As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you," God says to her and to all of us a few chapters later in Isaiah (66:13). I don't know just how God will comfort this weeping woman. I only know that God will, and God will grant her peace after her bold, life-giving act.

In the same way, God will comfort this tiny one's adoptive mother on those days when she weeps with weariness as he wakes in the night, night after night. God will comfort her when she weeps with frustration after one more "No!" or "Mine!" or "You're not the boss of me!" God's love will surround her when she weeps with joy at the news of a great report card or a wonderful girlfriend. God will fill her heart with comfort when she weeps bitter-sweet tears of pride and loss as he grabs his diploma and sails boldly out into the world on his own. God will bless her with peace.

**The Rev. Sue Gamelin and her husband, Tim, are pastors of Emmanuel Lutheran Church, High Point, North Carolina.**



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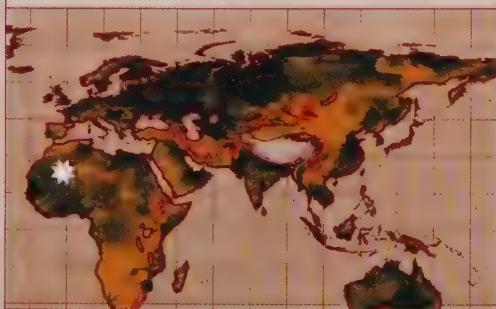
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## MAURITANIA



### GEOGRAPHY

398,000 square miles (about three times the size of New Mexico)

### CLIMATE

Desert, constantly hot, dry, arid, dusty

### POPULATION

2,829,000

### CAPITAL

Nouakchott (pop. 626,000)

### MAJOR RELIGIONS

100% Muslim

### LIFE EXPECTANCY

Men, 49 years; women, 54 years

### INFANT MORTALITY

75.2 deaths per 1,000 live births

### UNEMPLOYMENT

21%

### LABOR FORCE

50% agriculture, 40% services, 10% industry

### RESOURCES AND INDUSTRY

Natural resources: iron ore, gypsum, copper, phosphates  
Industry: mining, fish processing

### AGRICULTURE

Millet, sorghum, dates, root crops, cattle, sheep, fish and fish products

SEE THE ECUMENICAL PRAYER CYCLE ON PAGE 21.

## WOMEN SUSTAIN COMMUNITIES

by Anne Basye

**Stark contrasts characterize the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, a desert nation in northwest Africa.** Scholarship is revered, and its collections of ancient Arabic manuscripts draw visitors from around the world. Yet literacy rates are low. Its sand dunes are beautiful—yet they are swallowing the country's tiny sliver of arable land and threatening Nouakchott, the capital city.

Eight hundred years of slavery ended in 1980 when it was officially outlawed, yet an unknown number—perhaps hundreds of thousands of people—remain in bondage. Those who speak out risk imprisonment.

Islam, the state religion, is the common thread that unites three otherwise deeply divided groups: those of Arab and Berber heritage who control the government, black people of indigenous background, and black people descended from slaves or formerly enslaved (Haratines), who make up roughly 40 percent of the population.

Women in Mauritania enjoy more social freedom than in many other Islamic societies, but their lives are still limited.





While 80 percent of girls go to school today, many adult women are illiterate.

"Women in Mauritania struggle against poverty in a harsh environment," says Dr. Colette Bouka-Coula, the nation's Lutheran World Federation (LWF) representative. "Their daily concern is to look for food for their children and others they take care of, such as the elderly, sick, and handicapped."

The work of Mauritanian women is largely ignored in economic calculations. But through Lutheran World Federation (LWF) projects, they are finding a foothold in the informal financial system. Through work cooperatives, women are producing crafts, learning to read, and being trained in trades that contribute to the local economy. In the village of El Agba, the 200-member Marieme Women's Cooperative sell carpets that they weave. The group got started using funds administered through the LWF Mauritania program. As a result, the women are learning to earn and manage their own money.

"Husbands normally tolerate and encourage women to participate in these activities. They can see their benefits on their spouse's lives and their household in general," says Bouka-Coula. "Women are more confident, courageous, and bold. Economic independence increases their self-esteem and motivates them to take care of their lives."

### **BUT IS IT PEACEMAKING?**

The LWF's development work in Mauritania includes a range of projects:

- Securing basic food supplies in communities
- Improving nutritional status
- Addressing environmental issues
- Lifting up human rights and gender equity
- Preventing HIV/AIDS
- Providing emergency assistance when needed.

This ambitious program, with its \$2.7 million price tag, enhances life for thousands of Mauritians. And, yes, it enhances peace, too.

Though Mauritania has no current conflicts with its neighbors, its domestic peace is fragile. Ethnic and class divisions simmer below the surface. Therefore, development projects that draw together people of different backgrounds can be constructive.

"When development is collaborative, it can create and sustain peace," said Dr. Belletech Deressa, director of international development and disaster response for the ELCA. "When people work together, they begin to see one another as human beings, and they will confront those who still believe in oppressing one another."

Since the LWF began working in the country in 1975, it has built a solid web of relationships with local leaders and hired many Muslims as staff. "Our work in Mauritania as Christians is a testimony that the work we are doing is also peace work," says Bouka-Coula. "In spite of our different faiths, we can work in mutual respect with the various communities and with the government bodies . . . to alleviate the suffering of people by fighting poverty and ignorance."

"Women are for peace," says Deressa. "Whether they work actively as peace advocates or increase their family's stability by participating in education and income-generating projects, they help sustain their communities." Adds Bouka-Coula: "Women constitute the foundation on which society is built. By making life better for women, we ensure everyone's well-being."

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Anne Basye is associate director for global resources, ELCA Division for Global Mission.



## | Lutheran Trees Make a Difference |

When water and agricultural land are in short supply, conflict can be intense. That's one reason the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to an environmental advocate in 2004. The committee recognized the link between a well-managed environment and peace.

In 1977, Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai began paying women to plant trees in Kenya, which had been deforested as a result of government corruption. Without trees, streams dried up, rich farmland turned to desert, and firewood was hard to find. Today, her Green Belt Movement has planted more than 30 million trees and provided jobs for more than 100,000 people, mostly women.

Mauritania has a green belt, too, and Lutherans can take credit for it. The Sahara desert has been expanding as winds push sand west and cover garden plots and pastures. Even the capital city of Nouakchott is endangered by the drifting sands.

In cooperation with the Mauritanian government, the LWF has been planting acacia trees in strategic areas where they can diffuse the wind and slow the advance of the dunes. A ring of trees known as the Green Belt of Nouakchott has saved the city. This natural technique has been so successful that it has been duplicated on a smaller scale in many villages.

Since 1975, the LWF has kept the desert at bay by planting about 35,000 trees a year. When people are not forced to move, they can work with the LWF on development projects. Men and women alike benefit from starting fruit and vegetable plots and small businesses that help generate income and break the cycle of hunger and poverty.

## MAURITANIA BACKGROUND

In 1991, Mauritania adopted its current constitution, which is based on the principles of fraternity, honor, and justice. Legally a multi-party democracy, the nation is ruled by President Ould Taya and his Republican Social Democratic Party. In 2002, a party representing the underclass of former slaves won four seats in the Parliament, and a handful of women are also members.

Extensive drought and desertification have reduced the land area usable for agriculture significantly. Less than 1 percent is arable, barely 10 percent can sustain grazing, and more than 75 percent is covered with sand. Locusts and grasshoppers have destroyed entire crops, including most of the trees planted by the Lutheran World Federation for reforestation efforts in 2004. As a result, many displaced rural people have fled to urban areas in hopes of work, but jobs are few. Most of the displaced rural people end up living in overcrowded, filthy shanty-towns.

Mauritania has been an Islamic republic since 1960, when it gained independence from France. The legal code is based on French civil law and Islamic law, and Islam is the official state religion. The long history between the two main ethnic groups is characterized by oppression and enslavement—even though slavery is now illegal. The Lutheran World Federation has been involved in developing the most underprivileged areas of the country and providing aid to those in need. It also works to restore land to a farmable condition, empower people, and promote human rights.





GRACE NOTES

## Offering Thanks

by Linda Post Bushkofsky

**IT'S NOVEMBER** AND THOUGHTS TURN TO GIVING THANKS, NOT ONLY BECAUSE THANKSGIVING OCCURS this month, but also because Women of the ELCA units often hold Thankoffering services now.

One Sunday evening years ago my husband visited a small congregation on the Minnesota prairie. A Lutheran missionary serving in South America was in the area, and the congregation gathered to meet him because they had often offered prayers and financial support for his work.

After dinner, the missionary presented a slide show, explaining his ministry setting. He served in a community in Guyana where most of the people made their living by farming—much like the folks attending the gathering that night. While people were mingling over coffee, someone asked the missionary if there was anything special that he needed.

He thought for a minute. Well, they had enough Bibles. The children had enough school supplies. But they could really use a tractor—not the large tractors used by many Midwestern farmers, but one that was especially useful for Guyana's challenging terrain. One of the people at the table asked how much one of those tractors might cost. The missionary wasn't sure, but he thought about \$10,000.

The farmer who asked the question wrote a check for \$1,000 that very evening—and before you knew it, other people whipped out their checkbooks as well. By the time everyone left, the missionary had enough money to buy the tractor. No one was more surprised than he, since he had not expected to make

any fundraising appeals that evening—his plan was merely to thank the congregation for the support they were giving already.

That's often how it is: Just when we least expect it, gifts and blessings come our way. You spot a rainbow as you're driving home from work, or a cardinal alights in your garden. The same is true in our life together in Women of the ELCA. The programming might be growing stale in your unit, and someone comes up with a great new idea. Or your enthusiasm for a longstanding service project is fading until a new member gets excited about the project and her excitement is contagious. With each gift or blessing, the cycle of giving continues.

I recall a Southeastern Asian family that had come to Pennsylvania as refugees, aided by Lutheran congregations there. That Buddhist family never forgot the generosity of those Lutherans, even after they had relocated elsewhere. The parents made financial gifts to the Lutheran church upon their children's marriages, in thanksgiving for the gifts the family had received. The cycle of giving continued.

As you prepare for a Thankoffering service this month, consider the gifts and blessings you have so generously received. May your Thankoffering reflect those gifts so that the ministry of Women of the ELCA may, in turn, be a blessing to others.

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Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director of Women of the ELCA.





A M E N !

# Peace and Perspective

by Catherine Malotky

**WHEN WE HAVE DIFFERENCES, GOD, HOW SHALL WE FIND PEACE? WE HAVE READ THE STORIES OF JESUS.**

He was sure of you and your way. He boldly broke rules when they were in the way of your mercy or justice.

But, the truth is, if we all operated as Jesus did, we'd be in quite a mess. We think we are so clear about your will and way, but our vision is limited. We do not have your view, God. We need each other's perspectives to help us fill out our picture of who you are.

In Jesus, we can see you loving indiscriminately—even prostitutes and outcasts. We can see you healing—even the servant of a centurion (an enemy occupier! Matthew 8:5–13). We can see you challenging the wisdom of the day—even that of the religious leaders of your chosen people. In Jesus, you were perfectly clear.

But, God, the translation to our lives is not so cut and dried. How will we deal with the social issues of our day? How will we decide what to do and what to believe? Can we ever claim to know for sure what you would do? The Bible can help. It has much to teach us, and it is your word. But it was also written to a people who lived in a much different world, with different understandings of how things worked. For example, our foremothers were considered unclean when their bodies cycled every month. We look at things differently now. We have differences with what the Bible says about these things.

We worship *you*, God, not the Bible. It is our teacher, but not our answer book. Yet, without the answers in writing, how can we know for sure?

Without clarity, we can torment each other, and sometimes do. Some claim to know for sure and then judge. Others are paralyzed by ambiguity and then never give witness to your wonders. What is the middle ground, God? How do we act boldly if we are not at peace within ourselves—if we cannot be sure of your will and way?

And yet, might this be the mystery of your way with us, God? Might this be the source of our humility and the wellspring of your grace?

Perhaps, dear God, you call us to do our best, to see the world in which we live from as close to your perspective as we can come, leaning on each other to help us broaden our vision. Perhaps we need those with whom we disagree as much as we need those with whom we agree. Perhaps we cannot, in faith, be absolutely sure, but can still be bold in your love and forgiveness.

You call us to do our best, to speak the truth as we see it, and then turn to you. It is your love that makes us bold. We are assured that even when our very best falls short of your vision for us and our world, we are no less yours and no less loved. Amen.

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Catherine Malotky serves the ELCA Board of Pensions as retirement planning manager. An ordained pastor, she has also been an editor, teacher, parish pastor, and retreat leader.